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KT photo | **Tim Bath**

House of Burgess: Democrats tussle before New York

Sanders, Clinton battle on Brooklyn debate stage

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

April 5, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders won the Wisconsin primaries in the Republican and Democratic races, respectively. April 8, Cruz won the Colorado Republican Convention. April 9, Sanders and Cruz won Wyoming. Tuesday will see Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island take to the polls. May 3, we here in Indiana will get our turn. (Finally.)

Yesterday, voters in New York took to the polls, and you know better than I who won that state. Sanders and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met on stage Thursday at the Duggal Greenhouse in Brooklyn for the CNN/NY1 debate, with moderators Wolf Blitzer, Dana Bash and Errol Louis.

Clinton clearly felt like she was playing to her home crowd, name-dropping New York multiple times. “I love being in Brooklyn. This is great,” she said at one point, apropos of nothing. She also repeatedly deployed her famously terrible cackle, sending shivers down my spine. Multiple times, Clinton referenced “New York values” as a positive, calling back to Cruz’s line of attack on Donald Trump in a previous Republican debate.

She then spun Sanders’ support for universal health care and arguments against superPAC money as attacks on President Obama, which drew boos from the audience. Sanders once again hit Clinton for not releasing the transcripts of the speeches from which she received enormous speaking fees. Clinton fired back by saying Sanders hadn’t released his tax returns. (Sanders began to make good on his pledge to do so by releasing the top pages of his 2014 returns the next day.)

Clinton said she’s always been for raising the minimum wage to $15. Does she not think we remember her saying $12 in a previous debate? It wasn’t that long ago. “I am sure a lot of people are very surprised to learn that you supported raising the minimum wage to 15 bucks an hour,” Sanders said.

When asked about the 1994 crime bill, she backpedaled and denounced mass incarceration. “I supported the crime bill,” she said. “My husband has apologized. He was the president who actually signed it, Senator Sanders voted for it. I’m sorry for the consequences that were unintended and that have had a very unfortunate impact on people’s lives.”

On the environment, Sanders says he has supported carbon tax and Clinton has supported fracking. “It’s easy to diagnose the problem. It’s harder to do something about the problem,” Clinton responded.

On defense, Sanders maintained we pay too much into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Clinton then doubled down on NATO support and a no-fly-zone in Syria. Sanders said Israel should have a right to exist, but criticized its 2014 Gaza response. Sanders said Clinton hasn’t defended Palestinian people enough. “We cannot continue to be one-sided,” he said.

On education, Sanders defended his free college and health care proposals, for which Clinton claimed numbers didn’t add up. “My late father said, if somebody promises you something for free, read the fine print,” she said. Sanders responded by citing other countries that do have them. Clinton retorted that she’s not against universal health care, but is for building on Obamacare to achieve the same goal. “If Senator Sanders doesn’t agree with how you are approaching something, then you are a member of the establishment,” she said.

As far as electability, Sanders said he is bringing in independent voters when asked about his Democratic loyalty. “I have gotten more votes than anyone running,” Clinton responded. Sanders, when asked about a contested convention, said he will win instead. He admitted he lost in the Deep South to Clinton, but said the best is ahead.

Winners: Both

Highlight: Sanders on Clinton’s stance on banks: “Secretary Clinton called them out. Oh, my goodness, they must have been really crushed by this. And was that before or after you received huge sums of money by giving speaking engagements? So they must have been very, very upset by what you did.”

Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor, may be reached by calling 765-454-8577, via email at rob.burgess@kokomotribune.com or on Twitter at twitter.com/robaburg.